

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Child and Family Services
11 State House Station
2 Anthony Avenue
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Tel.: (207) 624-7900; Toll Free: (877) 680-5866
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay); Fax: (207) 287-5282

Dear Parent,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information regarding how the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) is responding to COVID-19 as it pertains to families involved with child welfare services.

First and foremost, we are dedicated to ensuring you are able to maintain a connection with your children given this challenging time within our state. OCFS is following the guidance of the U.S. and Maine Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and have created a plan to ensure the health and safety of you, your children and resource families. Below are links to these websites:

- Maine CDC: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/>
- Maine CDC Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/MaineCDC>
- US CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

As a precaution and to ensure the safety of families, OCFS will be cancelling all in person visits for the next two weeks, at which time the protocol will be reviewed. This includes family visitation at DHHS offices, visits arranged by resource parents and those held at contracted visitation agencies. To ensure that you are able to remain connected to your children, staff will be contacting you in the next few days to coordinate contact to occur through phone calls and video conferencing, such as FaceTime, Skype or other means available to you and resource families. Supervision will be provided by resource parents, case aides or agency staff. The duration of calls or video conferences will depend on the age/ability of the children – for example, a 15-minute call or video conference with an infant to check in with the resource parent and observe your infant may be appropriate while a longer call or video conference may be appropriate for older children or youth.

At this time, OCFS will also be suspending all in person face-to face monthly visits through the end of April for families with a current child welfare child. This protocol will continue to be reviewed as updated information is received from the CDC. To ensure that OCFS is remaining connected to youth, parents and resource parents, your caseworker will contact you by phone call or video conferencing to complete the monthly contact.

Social distancing is the key to minimizing exposure and whenever necessary staff will convene/facilitate Family Team Meetings through phone calls or video conferencing. For court, judges are minimizing in-person court appearances whenever possible. Some will still be necessary, and caseworkers or your attorneys will contact you if are required to be at court.

We recognize the importance of your connection with your children and below are resources that may be helpful to assist you in talking with your children to help them understand what is happening and why some of the changes being put in place are necessary:

- Talking about Disease in the News (Bradley Hospital): <https://www.bradleyhospital.org/talking-about-diseases-news>
- How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus (PBS): <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus>
- How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus (NY Times): <https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-kids-talk>

OCFS is committed to ensuring that your connection with your children is maintained. Please reach out to your assigned caseworker if you have any questions. If you have an emergent need, please contact the OCFS Child Protection Hotline at 1-800-452-1999. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Sincerely,

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW
Associate Director of Child Welfare Services
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Child and Family Services

March 17, 2020